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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1716 (2006) of 13 October 2006, by which the Security Council decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) until 15 April 2007. It provides an update of the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, since my report of 11 January 2007 (S/2007/15).

2. My Special Representative, Jean Arnault, continued to lead the Mission. He was assisted by the Chief Military Observer, Major General Niaz Muhammad Khan Khattak (Pakistan). The strength of UNOMIG on 1 April 2007 stood at 129 military observers and 13 police officers (see annex).

II. Political process

3. During the reporting period, UNOMIG continued its efforts to facilitate dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, to prevent escalation of tensions and to maintain stability in the zone of conflict. The three priorities endorsed by the United Nations-chaired high-level meetings of the Group of Friends (see S/2004/315, paras. 5-7) and agreements between the Presidents of the Russian Federation and Georgia reached in Sochi (see S/2003/412, para. 5) remained on the agenda for dialogue between the sides. Efforts and activities in this framework are aimed at improving confidence between the sides and facilitating meaningful negotiations on a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict, taking into account the principles contained in the document entitled "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi", its transmittal letter (see S/2002/88, para. 3) and additional ideas by the sides.

4. My Special Representative maintained regular contacts throughout the period with both sides, as well as the Group of Friends, including in their respective capitals. During the reporting period, UNOMIG facilitated visits to the zone of conflict and Sukhumi, including by a European Union assessment mission led by Hugues Mingarelli, European Commission Director for Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, which was joined by Peter Semneby, the European Union Special Representative for the South Caucasus; Thomas Hammarberg,

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Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights; and visits in January and April by representatives of the Tbilisi-based Group of Friends.

5. Shortly after the Security Council's session in January on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, on 12 and 13 February senior representatives of the Group of Friends met in Geneva under the chairmanship of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, and with the participation of my Special Representative. The meeting discussed the peace process and ways to promote dialogue between the sides to the conflict and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1716 (2006). The Georgian and Abkhaz delegations, led by the State Minister for Conflicts Resolution Merab Antadze and de facto Foreign Minister Sergey Shamba, respectively, took part in the meeting. The United Nations and the Group of Friends reiterated their support for a negotiated solution and the relevance of Security Council resolutions in this respect. Noting the primary responsibility of the two sides in the settlement of the conflict, they believed that a comprehensive political solution could be achieved through dialogue and that the situation on the ground in the areas of security, return of internally displaced persons and refugees; and rehabilitation and development could and must be improved. They also reiterated the readiness of the international community to assist.

6. In their separate discussions with the Friends, the sides stated their views and positions regarding the peace process and reviewed progress achieved in implementing Security Council resolution 1716 (2006). The Georgian side expressed its readiness for direct dialogue with the Abkhaz side at all levels and without preconditions, including a meeting at the highest level. Acknowledging the deteriorating security situation in Gali, it proposed high-level meetings on security issues, and offered to enhance transparency and confidence in the upper Kodori valley, including through inclusion of Abkhaz representatives in monitoring visits. It agreed on the need for a regime of notification and verification in the security zone. It reaffirmed its commitment to rehabilitation activities as part of the existing programme funded by the European Commission. The Georgian side reaffirmed the fundamental principle of the right of return for all internally displaced persons and refugees, including beyond the Gali district. In this respect, it agreed to move forward on the implementation of the strategy paper on returns of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (see S/2005/453, para. 5). The Georgian side stated its readiness to facilitate contacts between the Abkhaz side and the Abkhaz community in Turkey. For its part, the Abkhaz side stated that the resumption of dialogue required strict adherence to previous agreements. In particular, it emphasised the need for the withdrawal of armed personnel from the upper Kodori valley. Expressing its readiness to resolve the situation there, the Abkhaz side suggested a gradual transfer of law enforcement functions to the local community together with the possible involvement of international police. The Abkhaz side also underlined the need to reduce tensions in the Gali district in the light of recent violent incidents (see S/2007/15, paras. 9 and 17), and proposed to reinvigorate existing security mechanisms to that effect. The Abkhaz side supported the idea of a meeting at the highest level, provided that it led to concrete outcomes, such as the signing of a document on the non-resumption of hostilities or the lifting of economic restrictions. It also expressed its readiness to implement the UNHCR strategy paper on returns, in the first instance to the Gali district.

7. The Friends encouraged both sides to resume dialogue. They stressed in particular the need for immediate engagement on security issues. Acknowledging progress on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1716 (2006), the Friends urged the parties to continue to take concrete steps on confidence-building measures. They highlighted the need to refrain from any action that could impede progress or undermine confidence, and urged the sides to take into account one another's sensitivities and to cooperate to deescalate tensions. With respect to the Kodori valley, they noted the need to ensure compliance with the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces signed in Moscow on 14 May 1994, as well as the maintenance of law and order. They reaffirmed the right to return of internally displaced persons and refugees to Abkhazia, Georgia, and encouraged the sides to focus on practical steps to improve conditions for returns, in the first instance to the Gali district. The Friends deemed it useful to keep under review the contribution of the international presence, including police, to the implementation of the 1994 Moscow Agreement and the Security Council resolutions with a view to strengthening the confidence of the sides and the communities affected by the conflict.

8. In the aftermath of the Geneva meeting, the Abkhaz side maintained its position that the resumption of dialogue on non-technical issues required meeting its concerns related to the upper Kodori valley, namely the withdrawal of Georgian armed personnel and the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. It also insisted on the release of Pridon Chakaberia (see S/2007/15, paras. 8 and 16) and David Sigua (see para. 15 below), both ethnic Georgians working in the Gali district's de facto administrative structures. As a gesture of its goodwill, on 14 February the Abkhaz side released Levan Mamasakhlisi, who was serving a 14-year sentence on charges of terrorism.

9. While trying to improve conditions for the resumption of dialogue, my Special Representative continued to emphasize to both sides the need to address the provisions of resolution 1716 (2006) concerning each of them. He also underlined the need to convene as soon as possible the Steering Committee for the rehabilitation programme funded by the European Commission for the zone of conflict (see S/2006/19, para. 6) in order to ensure that the programme responded to their concerns. Progress in this regard is reflected in section III of the present report.

10. Simultaneously, the controversy over peacekeeping formats continued (see S/2006/771, para. 5). While the Abkhaz side opposed any change to the current format, the Government of Georgia presented its case for a change in the peacekeeping format to the European Union and other international actors. Controversy also continued with regard to the role of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. The Georgian side encouraged the international community to engage with it, while the Abkhaz side remained adamantly opposed to this approach.

11. In February and March the Abkhaz side conducted self-styled local and parliamentary elections. They were denounced by the Georgian side, and deemed illegitimate by the European Union, the United States of America, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. UNOMIG, guided by relevant Security Council resolutions on the matter, did not observe these self-styled elections.

III. Developments in the Mission's area of responsibility

Gali sector

12. In my previous report, I noted that since early December the focus of tensions between the two sides had shifted to the zone of conflict, in particular the Gali district. This has, unfortunately, remained the case during the first months of 2007. Indeed, the overall security situation in the Gali sector has been characterized by high tensions between the two sides throughout most of the reporting period, in particular in relation to the self-styled elections.

13. The Abkhaz side deployed additional militia personnel and established additional posts throughout the Gali district. The overall militia strength, however, remained below the 600 threshold as stipulated in the Gali Protocol of May 2000. UNOMIG continued increased patrolling, with a particular focus along the ceasefire line and key areas within the security zone. The Mission also deployed, when required, a forward patrol base in lower Gali, co-located with the checkpoint of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

14. On 1 March an exchange of fire took place across the ceasefire line between Abkhaz militia and Georgian law enforcement officers. The incident occurred during a protest against the self-styled election by a newly established Georgian youth movement, which took place on the ceasefire line near Shamgona, south of the Inguri Bridge. Several Zugdidi students crossed back and forth over the ceasefire line. Three of them were apprehended on the Abkhaz side by the militia, who fired warning shots in the air. This, in turn, prompted a protracted exchange of small arms fire between the Abkhaz militia and Georgian police officers. No casualties were reported. The firing stopped when a special UNOMIG patrol arrived at the scene. A UNOMIG fact-finding team investigation into the incident was subsequently initiated. UNOMIG cautioned that the exercise of civil and political rights in the vicinity of the ceasefire line should be carried out in a manner that does not allow for misunderstandings, miscalculation and subsequent violence. UNOMIG conveyed to the Abkhaz side the demand of the Georgian side that the three students be released.

15. Criminal activity as reported to UNOMIG patrols included six shootings, six robberies and four abductions. The resurgence of brutal kidnappings for ransom is a worrisome development. In a high profile case, on 3 February David Sigua, Head of the Gali de facto Election Committee, was abducted from his home in Gali town by unknown perpetrators. The Abkhaz side claimed that Georgian Special Forces were behind the incident and that the reason for the abduction was his cooperation with the de facto authorities, as was the case with Pridon Chakaberia. The Georgian side denied any involvement.

16. UNOMIG has increased its support for efforts to combat crime. The United Nations police have already conducted five training courses for 55 local law enforcement officers in the Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts. UNOMIG cooperation for the remainder of 2007 will focus on training; equipment; information exchange and advice; and support to cooperation on law enforcement issues across the ceasefire line.

17. Since March, an international human rights officer from the Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, has been assigned to the UNOMIG Gali sector

headquarters with a view to strengthening the capacity of the Office and liaising with the newly created Human Rights Centre in Gali created by Gali and Sukhumi-based non-governmental organizations. The Human Rights Centre's programme for 2007 includes legal aid to Gali residents; human rights training, including training of local de facto administration; awareness-building; and the creation of an information and resource centre.

18. On 6 February, in an address to the residents of the Gali district, de facto President Sergei Bagapsh gave an assurance that there would be no forceful imposition of Abkhaz citizenship, and that the de facto legislation provided for alternative ways to enjoy resident's status.

19. During the reporting period, the issue of the language of instruction remained of concern to the local population and those willing to return. The situation was essentially unchanged, with instruction taking place in Russian in upper Gali district and Gali town, and in Georgian in lower Gali district.

Zugdidi sector

20. The overall security situation in Zugdidi sector remained calm, although affected by the tense environment in the overall zone of conflict. Two killings, nine shooting incidents and one robbery were reported to UNOMIG patrols. Georgian movement through the security zone to and from the upper Kodori valley declined significantly due to harsh winter conditions and closure of the Khida Pass. UNOMIG observed no overland movement of military transport during that period. On 26 February, following improved weather conditions, UNOMIG redeployed its temporary observation post, co-located with the CIS peacekeeping force checkpoint in the Zugdidi security zone on the road to the upper Kodori valley.

21. During the reporting period, UNOMIG observed a total of 22 Georgian overflights through the security zone. As mentioned in my previous report, UNOMIG and the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs have been discussing a process of notification and verification for all movements through the security zone to and from the upper Kodori valley. In February, UNOMIG and the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs agreed on such enhanced transparency in the security zone. Eight flights were so far notified. The Mission emphasizes the need for a comprehensive notification and verification mechanism to be in place when the Khida Pass reopens in spring. In addition, subject to the security environment and appropriate guarantees, UNOMIG plans to reactivate its team base in Adjara, upper Kodori valley, which should contribute to the transparency of air transport to the valley.

22. On 16 February, Pridon Chakaberia was sentenced by a Zugdidi court to 10 years imprisonment for possession of and trafficking in narcotics (see S/2007/15, paras. 8 and 16). The Abkhaz side maintained its position as stated in paragraphs 8 and 15 above.

23. On 3 March, Georgian youth movements organized a demonstration on the Inguri Bridge to demand the release of the three Georgian youths detained by the Abkhaz side (see para. 14) and in opposition to the self-styled elections. UNOMIG, in cooperation with the CIS peacekeeping force, Zugdidi police and organizers of the demonstration, deployed two highly visible patrols prior to and throughout the duration of the demonstration, which passed without incident. On 14 March, a

peaceful demonstration, organized by the same youth movements, was held outside the Mission's Zugdidi headquarters.

24. During the reporting period, the United Nations police conducted 13 training courses for 153 local law enforcement personnel in basic policing skills, crime scene management and community policing. In addition, the United Nations police facilitated participation by 15 Georgian police officers in a modern policing training course at the Police College of the Estonian Public Service Academy, which took place from mid-January to mid-February. From 20 to 23 March, 25 Zugdidi police officers, including 13 women, participated in a conference on fostering a culture of human rights, which was organized by United Nations police and financed by the Council of Europe. For the first time, the United Nations police also conducted eight joint patrols with Georgian police within the security zone. The United Nations police also continued implementation of its community policing and gender equality project by conducting, in conjunction with Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Women's Police Association, crime prevention courses throughout the Zugdidi district.

Kodori valley

25. On 26 February, UNOMIG conducted a one-day patrol through the lower Kodori valley to assess road conditions and the feasibility of re-establishing a temporary observation post co-located with the CIS peacekeeping force check post in upper Lata.

26. From 5 to 7 March, UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force conducted a third joint patrol of the lower and upper Kodori valley after a two-month break due to adverse weather and road conditions (see S/2007/15, paras. 19 and 20). The joint patrol was provided with the usual security guarantees and excellent cooperation from both sides. It aimed at ensuring transparency in the deployment of security forces in the valley and observing its consistency with the 1994 Moscow Agreement. The joint patrol travelled extensively throughout lower and upper Kodori valley and was afforded full access to security personnel, posts and installations. The patrol en route did not observe any change in the deployment of the Abkhaz militia check posts in the lower Kodori valley. In the upper Kodori valley, Georgian officials provided details of their security force deployment, under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It included 284 personnel on rotational deployment from the criminal police and special tasks departments; and 100 locally recruited border guards. The personnel from the criminal police and special tasks departments were armed with personal weapons. Section weapons (rocket-propelled grenade launchers and machine guns) were available for deployment from armouries. Ammunition stores and logistic and maintenance bases were open for inspection. The patrol saw boxes of 23mm ammunition that had been declared during the previous patrol. Georgian officials reiterated that there were no heavy weapons corresponding to this ammunition. The patrol recommended that, in accordance with the 1994 Moscow Agreement, this ammunition be withdrawn from the valley. In general, the patrol did not observe any deployment of heavy weapons. The patrol observed that the two armoured recovery vehicles that were inspected in December 2006 had been converted to provide a medical evacuation capability under the Red Cross sign. UNOMIG would propose that they be replaced with civilian vehicles once the Khida Pass is reopened. UNOMIG has taken note of the intention of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to align its presence in the upper Kodori valley with manning levels elsewhere in Georgia and will continue to follow this process.

27. Late in the evening of 11 March, the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs informed UNOMIG that five helicopters had approached the upper Kodori valley from the north and fired rockets at the villages of Chkhalta and Adjara. In addition, some artillery (GRAD type) rockets, allegedly fired from the south, had also hit the upper Kodori valley. The Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia building in Chkhalta and a Ministry of Internal Affairs post were damaged, but no casualties were reported. The CIS peacekeeping force checkpoint at upper Lata, in the lower Kodori valley, reported observing flares and hearing bursts of automatic weapons fire and truck movement. A Joint Fact-Finding Group investigation was convened on 12 March with the consent and participation of all its members, namely the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, the CIS peacekeeping force and UNOMIG. In an unprecedented development, Georgian Joint Fact-Finding Group participants accompanied the Group through the Abkhaz-controlled territory en route to the upper Kodori valley, and Abkhaz representatives accompanied the Group throughout the investigation in the upper Kodori valley. So far, the Group has carried out two visits to various locations in the upper Kodori valley where the incident took place to examine the impact sites, collect evidence, make measurements and interview witnesses. It has also held four sessions to discuss its findings and attempt to come to common conclusions regarding the circumstances of the 11 March events. The investigation is still in progress. UNOMIG has taken note with appreciation of the fact that, notwithstanding the seriousness of the incident, the two sides and the international community have taken a prudent stance in their public statements and allowed the Joint Fact-Finding Group the necessary time to carry out its difficult work.

28. On 21 February, UNOMIG, the CIS peacekeeping force and the Georgian and Abkhaz sides cooperated in an emergency medical evacuation of a Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs serviceman from the upper Kodori valley through the lower Kodori valley to Zugdidi. The evacuation had been requested by the Georgian side due to the inaccessibility of the upper Kodori valley from the Khida Pass or by helicopter.

Mission-wide developments

29. During the period under review, two violations of the 1994 Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces were issued as follows: on 20 January to the Abkhaz side for the presence on 10 January of an Abkhaz armoured personnel carrier carrying seven soldiers near the Ochamchira training area in the restricted weapons zone; on 16 March to the Georgian side for the presence since 15 February of a Georgian military police detachment in Zugdidi town, which is in the security zone.

30. Weekly quadripartite meetings, which bring together the two sides to the conflict, UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force to discuss security issues in the conflict zone, remained suspended (see S/2007/15, para. 26). The Joint Fact-Finding Group at present has seven cases under investigation, including the 11 March incident in the upper Kodori valley (see para. 27 above), with three others awaiting closure.

31. Maritime incidents off the coastal waters of Abkhazia, Georgia, contributed to the rise in tensions. On 10 January, the Georgian Coast Guard entered Abkhaz-controlled waters and detained two foreign fishing boats, which the Abkhaz side regarded as a provocation. On 6 February, the Abkhaz de facto Foreign Minister

informed UNOMIG that Georgian fishing vessels, accompanied by Georgian patrol boats, were operating near Ochamchira, and that the Abkhaz side was preparing to take imminent action. UNOMIG was in contact with both sides to rapidly de-escalate the situation, which prevented an armed confrontation. Subsequently, UNOMIG increased its coastal patrols.

IV. Cooperation with the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States

32. UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force maintained close cooperation in fulfilling their respective mandates. In addition to joint patrols in both the lower and upper Kodori valley, the CIS peacekeeping force also provided logistical assistance to the Mission's temporary forward bases established adjacent to one of its checkpoints in lower Gali and its temporary observation post in Zugdidi sector (see paras. 13 and 20). On 14 February, UNOMIG conducted an emergency rescue exercise with the CIS peacekeeping force.

V. Human rights issues

33. During the reporting period, the Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, successfully completed the first stage of its free legal aid to the vulnerable project, which is funded by the Government of Finland and implemented by the Association of Abkhaz Lawyers. In total, 117 persons were provided with legal aid in 106 civil and 11 criminal cases throughout Abkhazia, Georgia, including in remote areas of Gali and Ochamchira districts. The project concluded with a round table on the theme of presumption of innocence, with the participation of representatives from de facto law enforcement agencies, prosecutor's office and courts. Participants recommended that this service be extended to other areas where legal aid services are practically non-existent.

34. Property rights violations continued to be an important issue. A new civil code has been passed by the de facto parliament, which guarantees court protection of property rights. However, courts have continued to decline as inadmissible claims filed by owners displaced by hostilities since 1992 to repossess their illegally occupied property. The Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, has repeatedly drawn the attention of the de facto authorities to the need to discontinue this practice.

35. In March, the de facto authorities appointed a presidential commissioner for human rights. The commissioner is expected to present, by June, a report on the situation of human rights on the territory and to make, on this basis, proposals to the de facto Parliament on the establishment of mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

VI. Humanitarian and rehabilitation activities

36. The Mission continued to rehabilitate three hospitals in the conflict zone as part of the rehabilitation programme funded by the European Commission. Work on

the Tkvarcheli hospital has been completed and rehabilitation of the two hospitals in Ochamchira and Zugdidi is expected to be concluded in mid-April.

37. United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations continued to assist vulnerable groups affected by the conflict on the Abkhaz-controlled side of the ceasefire line. The United Nations Development Programme continued its integrated recovery programme and activities in the framework of the rehabilitation programme funded by the European Commission in the zone of conflict. Its activities included agricultural income-generation assistance, water rehabilitation projects and capacity-building efforts for local stakeholders in the Gali, Tkvarcheli and Ochamchira districts; and maintenance of the Sukhumi information centre for the international and local aid community working in the region.

38. On the sidelines of the Geneva meeting (see para. 5), the Georgian and Abkhaz sides met with the Assistant United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Both sides reiterated their support for the strategic paper on returns (see S/2005/453, para. 5), prepared by UNHCR. UNHCR reaffirmed the right to return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and encouraged the sides to focus on practical steps.

39. In the zone of conflict, UNHCR and its partner organizations, the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, continued to implement its humanitarian assistance programme. During the reporting period, this included the distribution of firewood, shelter assistance, microgrants and related training, agricultural support and small-scale community mobilization projects.

40. Since January 2007, the World Food Programme (WFP) has provided on-site feeding for 10,000 schoolchildren in 82 schools throughout Abkhazia, Georgia, and has launched a new round of agricultural assets rehabilitation providing food to 12,000 beneficiaries in the Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts in collaboration with World Vision International.

41. With financial support from the United States of America and the European Commission, the HALO Trust continued mine clearance and explosive ordnance disposal throughout Abkhazia, Georgia. Owing to heavy snow and poor weather conditions, HALO suspended its activities in the Kodori valley until the beginning of March.

42. World Vision International launched the third phase of its school feeding and agricultural assets rehabilitation programme in partnership with WFP, and continued its back-to-school project, which has returned almost 70 children to school in Ochamchira. It expanded its microcredit disbursements in Gali and Sukhumi to 200 small businessmen and continued business and management education for the local university, local non-governmental organizations and district administrations. Première Urgence completed its housing rehabitation in Abkhazia programme, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and rehabilitated 11 apartment blocks and 200 individual houses/flats throughout Abkhazia, Georgia. Première Urgence also launched a new programme, funded by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), to improve the livelihoods and food security of 550 farmers in the Sukhumi, Gulripsh, Tkvarcheli, Gali and Ochamchira districts. The Swedish foundation, Kvinna till Kvinna, started its fourth joint project on peacebuilding by bringing together two women's non-governmental

organizations for internally displaced persons, one Abkhaz and the other Georgian, and also continued its long-term funding for five Abkhaz women's organizations. Médecins Sans Frontières continues to support its tuberculosis programme, and its health access programme, although being downsized, continued to build quality of care for the extremely vulnerable in Sukhumi and Tkvarcheli. The International Committee of the Red Cross and other international and non-government organizations also continued to provide support throughout Abkhazia, Georgia.

VII. Support issues

43. UNOMIG has identified for repair in 2007 key roads and bridges in the zone of conflict used by its military observers for patrolling.

44. UNOMIG maintained its awareness campaign on the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS through its induction training. The Mission training cell, in collaboration with the medical team, facilitated the distribution of HIV/AIDS material. The Mission also continued implementation of preventive measures and policies on zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse. No cases of either sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment were reported. Since my previous report, 20 additional military and 6 new civilian personnel have been briefed on sexual exploitation and abuse. The Mission continued its successful outreach programme on sexual exploitation and abuse for the local population by circulating posters in the community and advertisements through the local electronic and print media in cooperation with its in-country network of United Nations agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations.

VIII. Financial aspects

45. In its resolution 60/273, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $34.8 million for the maintenance of UNOMIG for the period from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate for UNOMIG beyond 15 April 2007, the cost of maintaining the Observer Mission until 30 June 2007 would be limited to the amount approved by the General Assembly. The proposed budget for UNOMIG for the period from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 would be considered by the General Assembly at the second part of its resumed sixty-first session.

46. As at 31 December 2006, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNOMIG amounted to $13.4 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to $1,890 million.

47. As at 31 December 2006, the amount owed for equipment costs totalled $184,000. Owing to the Mission's precarious financial situation, reimbursement of contingent-owned equipment costs has been suspended since 1 October 2004 and continues to be in arrears.

IX. Observations

48. Like the Group of Friends at the meeting held at Gevena on 13 and 14 February, I welcome progress made by the two sides towards implementation of Security Council resolution 1716 (2006). In particular I welcome the continuation of joint patrolling of the Kodori valley by UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force. I note with satisfaction that no heavy weapons were observed in the valley and that, compared with the situation observed by the October 2006 joint patrol, the number of armed personnel has decreased. I am encouraged by the start of a notification and verification process on the Zugdidi side of the security zone. I welcome as well the expansion of UNOMIG assistance to the Gali district in terms of both the activities of the United Nations police advisers and the full-time presence there of the Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia. I hope that the appointment of a presidential commissioner for human rights by the de facto Abkhaz authorities will enable them to address better human rights issues raised by UNOMIG as well as local non-governmental organizations. I also hope that each side will value the steps thus taken by the other side, and will take further measures to improve the confidence between them, in line with the commitments given in Geneva.

49. Against this positive background, the events of 11 March in the upper Kodori valley were a major setback. While, fortunately, causing no casualty, the incident offered a reminder of the risks with which the conflict is still fraught, and the potential for existing tensions to take a violent course. I hope that the investigation carried out by the Joint Fact-Finding Group will help clarify the circumstances behind this incident; and I am grateful to the two sides for the moderation they have shown in their public statements and for allowing the Group the time needed to fulfil its difficult task. I also believe that, after the October 2006 incident when three surface-to-surface missiles landed in the upper Kodori valley, this new development highlights the need for the parties and the international community to approach the situation in the Kodori valley also in terms of prevention. Indeed, with very limited international observation, the Kodori valley will most likely remain vulnerable to further incidents if no measures are taken. The planned reactivation, security permitting, of the UNOMIG team base in Adjara, in the upper Kodori valley, will partially address this issue. In consultation with all concerned, the United Nations will reflect further on ways and means to strengthen the peacekeeping regime in that region in order to lower the possibility of a recurrence of such incidents.

50. While the Kodori valley has been the scene of the most dramatic development during the period under review, I regret to note that the situation along the ceasefire line has remained tense since my previous report to the Security Council. While there have been no casualties, cooperation between the two sides on security issues and combating crime is almost non-existent, in contrast to the situation during the same period last year. The exchange of fire that took place on 1 March shows the need for both sides to exercise the utmost restraint and caution in and around the ceasefire line. In Geneva, both sides acknowledged the deterioration of the situation along the ceasefire line and expressed their readiness to redress it. I urge them to make good on this commitment and to take every precaution in order to avoid situations that can lead to violence. I remind that both sides have expressed their support to the return of internally displaced people, in the first instance to the Gali district, and the implementation of the UNHCR plan to that effect. However, further return of internally displaced persons and the improvement of the situation of the

Gali residents will only become a realistic prospect if the ceasefire line becomes an area of genuine cooperation, not confrontation. UNOMIG will pay particular attention to this problem in the upcoming period.

51. In Geneva, the two sides reaffirmed their support for dialogue, including at the highest level. This is an area where the provisions of Security Council resolution 1716 (2006) have remained unimplemented. I am convinced that while unilateral measures by each side aimed at confidence-building remain necessary, they are not sufficient; and direct negotiation is irreplaceable in addressing security matters, rehabilitation and economic cooperation and the larger issues relating to a political settlement. My Special Representative and UNOMIG will seek to assist the two sides in overcoming those issues that still stand in the way of genuine negotiations. I trust that, in meeting these challenges, the United Nations will continue to rely on the support of the Group of Friends, which proved again invaluable during the period under review, as well as the assistance of other international organizations and Member States. I continue to believe that the presence of UNOMIG contributes to security in the conflict zone and international efforts to promote political dialogue between the parties. I therefore, recommend that the mandate of UNOMIG be extended for six months, until 15 October 2007.

52. In concluding, I wish to reiterate my tribute to my Special Representative, Jean Arnault, the Chief Military Observer, Major General Niaz Muhammad Khan Khattak, and the men and women of UNOMIG for their dedication to the search for a fair and lasting solution to this unresolved conflict, in a complex and tense environment.

Annex

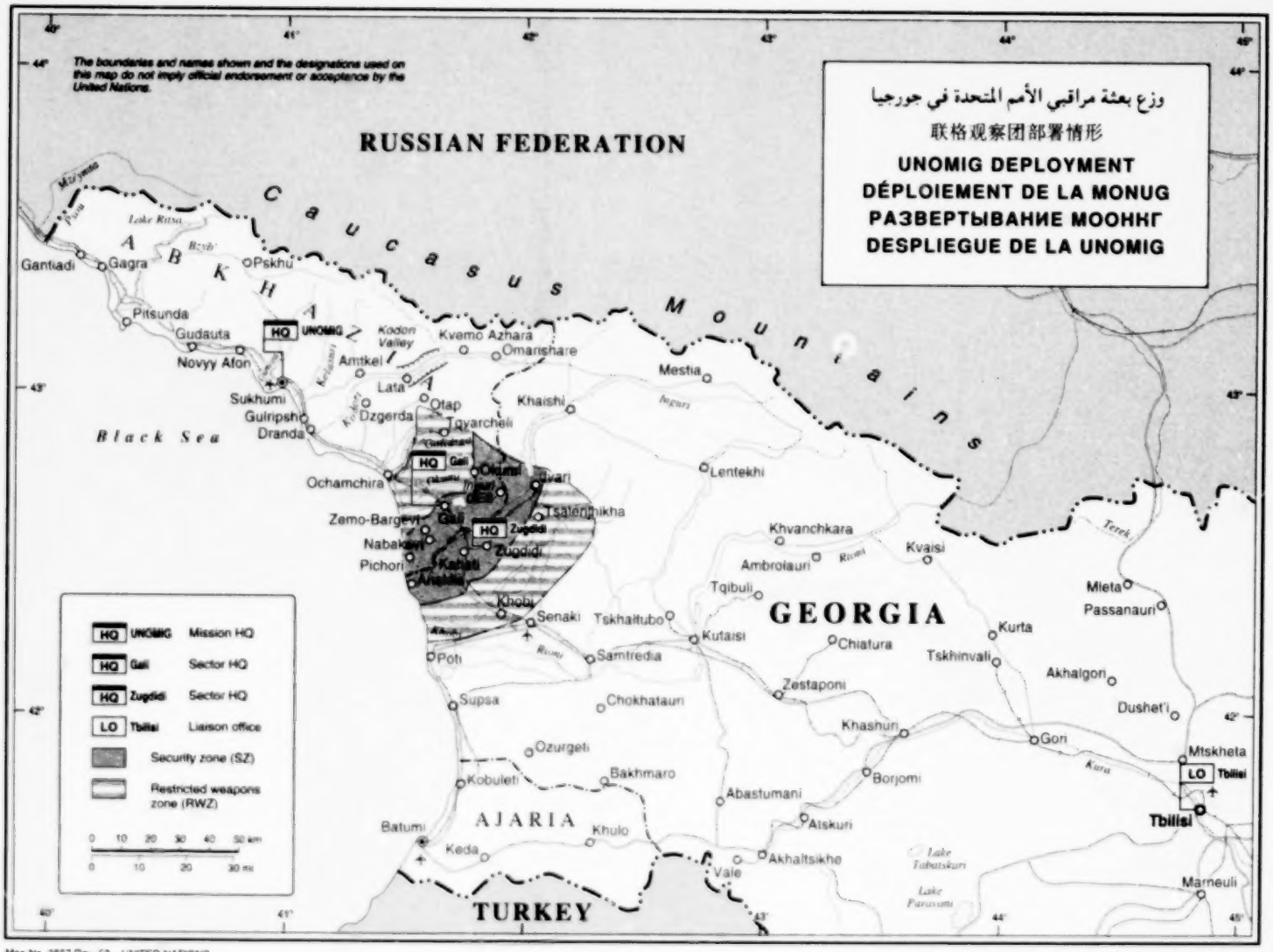
Countries providing military observers and civilian police personnel (as at 1 April 2007)

Country	*Military observers*
Albania	3
Austria	2
Bangladesh	7
Croatia	2
Czech Republic	5
Denmark	6
Egypt	6
France	3
Germany	12
Greece	5
Hungary	7
Indonesia	4
Jordan	7
Lithuania	2
Moldova	1
Pakistan	11[a]
Poland	5
Republic of Korea	8
Romania	1
Russian Federation	3
Sweden	3
Switzerland	5
Turkey	5
Ukraine	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	5
United States of America	2
Uruguay	3
Yemen	1
Total	**129**

[a] Including the Chief Military Observer.

Country	*Civilian police personnel*
Germany	4
Ghana	1
Poland	2
Russian Federation	2
Switzerland	3
Ukraine	1[a]
Total	**13**

[a] The Senior Police Adviser.



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Cartographic Section